



SOCIAL SECURITY

The Commissioner

August 16, 2005

The Honorable Neil Abercrombie
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Abercrombie:

I am writing to update you on the status of Social Security efforts to implement the Medicare prescription drug low-income subsidy program under the *Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003*. We are committed to having as many potentially eligible beneficiaries as possible file for this extra help, and to that end we will be making follow-up phone calls in certain circumstances. We want you to be aware of these follow-up contacts in case you receive constituent inquiries.

As I explained in my letter of May 25th, Social Security has mailed approximately 19 million low-income subsidy applications to potentially eligible individuals. We also are working with State agencies, community groups and other third-party organizations in an extensive outreach effort to assist everyone who might benefit from the subsidy program to apply. We continue to move forward on these efforts.

Medicare beneficiaries have begun to return completed applications. For the most part, the simplified application process is working well. However, in some instances, we have received applications with unanswered questions, illegible answers, or discrepancies between information the beneficiary provides and data we have on our records. In these cases, SSA employees will call the applicant to get the correct information or reconcile discrepancies. These phone contacts with low-income subsidy program applicants are just an extension of our current practice in other situations when we need additional information from an individual in order to complete an application for benefits. We believe that we can provide better and more efficient service over the telephone than through the mail or by having the individual come into an SSA field office.

We are doing something new with regard to following up with individuals to whom we have sent the low-income subsidy applications, but who have not yet returned them. Because we have learned through an earlier mailing of the applications that personal contacts can make a real difference in the public's response rate, we have decided to use a contractor to make follow-up calls to inquire whether the individual received or completed the application. The contractor is NCS Pearson, Inc, and its partner, the West

Corporation. If the individual says he or she did not receive an application when the contractor calls, we will send them one. If the individual has additional questions, issues, or otherwise needs help, the contractor will tell them that someone from Social Security will get back to them and refer the question to us. If the individual says he or she does not wish to file for the subsidy, the call will end.

Let me assure you that beyond the name, last known address of the beneficiary, and whether the individual speaks Spanish, the contractors will have no personal information about beneficiaries. Nor will they ever ask for personal information, such as Social Security number, date of birth, or income amounts. Social Security is committed to safeguarding all such personal information. In cases in which personal information is required, Social Security employees, not the contractor, will make the contact.

We understand that your constituents may at some point have a question about the legitimacy of a phone contact. Beneficiaries should know they should always check with us if they are suspicious about a call from someone claiming to be a Social Security employee. First, they should ask the caller for their name and return phone number. Then they should hang up and call Social Security at 1-(800)-772-1213. We will confirm whether the call is legitimate.

Thank you for your continued support of Social Security, as we strive to implement the prescription drug legislation and as we work to protect the privacy of our public. If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or have your staff contact Mr. Robert M. Wilson, Deputy Commissioner for Legislation and Congressional Affairs, at (202) 358-6030.

Sincerely,

/s./

Jo Anne B. Barnhart